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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Forty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 3rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 30 January 1991, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MARTIUS (Germany)
later: Mr. BERNALES BALLESTEROS (Peru)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE (agenda item 4) (continued) (E/CN.4/1991/6, 7, 8, 60, 61, 62 and 65; A/45/3, 13 and Add. 1, 35 and Corr. 1, 84, 306, 503, 576, 595, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614 and 726)

1. The CHAIRMAN invited participants to continue their consideration of agenda item 4.

2. Mr. ELARABY (Observer for Egypt) said that the Commission's session coincided with the problem of the occupation of Kuwait, which had held the attention of the entire world for nearly six months. His delegation would speak on that serious issue when the Commission came to consider the question of the violation of human rights in occupied Kuwait under agenda item 12.

3. The Middle East region had been an area of tension and destabilization for 40 years and the difficulties it had encountered were largely due to the international community's failure to find a just solution to the Palestinian problem, an issue that had been under consideration by United Nations bodies since 1947 and was like a chronic disease for which it appeared impossible to find a remedy. It was high time for the Palestinian people to be allowed to live in peace and security.

4. Many events in 1990 had reawakened a glimmer of hope in everyone's heart. The new international order had started to become a reality. It was based on respect for the law and on the agreement of the States of the international community to confer and to take rapid steps to ensure respect for the Charter of the United Nations. It was therefore to be hoped that better days would follow the present period.

5. The main question now was to determine the extent to which the international community was adhering to the principles of the new international order and whether it was doing so without any discrimination or was applying double standards. His delegation sincerely hoped that the international community would ensure respect for international law in all cases of violation of human rights wherever they occurred and that it would succeed in finding a just settlement of the Palestinian problem in implementation of the Charter of the United Nations.

6. It could be seen from the reports submitted by United Nations bodies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories and by UNRWA that the escalation of violence against the Palestinian people was continuing. The massacre of Palestinians in the Al-Aqsa Mosque in October 1990 by the Israeli forces of occupation (E/CN.4/1991/60) was but one of many examples. The situation in the occupied territories was deteriorating alarmingly. The curfew imposed on the people was lasting much more than the usual few days and the Arab population was allowed only a few hours a day to carry out the activities of everyday life. The occupied Arab territories were becoming one immense detention camp, a situation that could not be accepted or passed over in silence.

7. The reports of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the Security Council showed clearly that Israel's practices in the occupied Arab territories were flagrant breaches of the principles of international law and of all the commitments entered into by Israel. On the one hand, Israel must respect the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and accept its de jure applicability to the occupied Arab territories. In his report to the Security Council submitted in accordance with resolution 672 (1990), the Secretary-General of the United Nations had recommended that the international community should make a concerted effort to convince Israel of that requirement. It was also essential to reach a just and lasting settlement based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). There could be no genuine protection for Palestinians until the Israelis had completely withdrawn from the occupied territories.

8. However, until Israel withdrew from the territories and until the Palestinian people exercised their right to self-determination, the international community must assume its responsibilities under international human rights instruments. He therefore requested that consideration should be given to implementing the Secretary-General's proposal, in the aforementioned report to the Security Council, for a meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. Those Parties would have the necessary authority to adopt a resolution on the applicability and monitoring of application of the Convention. In the context of a search for a solution to the Palestinian problem, emphasis should be placed on a number of points: first, the responsibility of the Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention as far as implementation of the Convention was concerned; second, the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories, which in practice required Israel to regard the occupied territories as a trusteeship territory and presupposed that the international community would prevent anything detrimental to the character of the territories or any de jure annexation, such as had occurred in Jerusalem, or de facto annexation, as in the case of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; third, cessation of Israeli practices that contravened the Geneva Conventions; and fourth, non-recognition of any change that might be made in the character of the occupied territories. Egypt hoped that the question of a meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention would be considered objectively and with the intention of affording every possible protection to the Palestinians.

9. At the previous session, the Commission had adopted - without any objections - a resolution (1990/1) in which it affirmed that the settling of Israeli civilians in the occupied territories was illegal and contravened the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Regrettably, a year after the adoption of that resolution, the Israeli Government was priding itself on the growing number of immigrants arriving in Israel every day. It had been stated from an Israeli source that more than a million immigrants would be settled in Israel in the next two years. The Commission should shoulder its responsibilities and adopt a resolution at the present session urging Israel to implement the provisions of resolution 1990/1 and put an end to the immigration of Soviet Jews. The arrival of immigrants was a fuse that could shortly set the entire region ablaze.

10. Lastly, he hoped that the Commission would unanimously adopt all the resolutions dealing with the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and aimed at condemning Israel.

11. Mr. HARUN UR RASHID (Bangladesh) said the question of human rights in the occupied Arab territories, including Palestine, had been under consideration in various bodies of the United Nations system for decades and had formed the subject of many conferences, seminars and meetings, signifying the great concern of the international community at the continuing deterioration of the human rights situation in those territories. That concern had also been expressed, both inside and outside the United Nations system, in numerous resolutions on and condemnations of the violations of human rights in those territories. From the beginning of Israel's illegal occupation, gross and shameless violations and abuses of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Palestinians had taken place.

12. In order to suppress the spontaneous popular uprising of the Palestinians who were struggling to recover their inalienable rights, the Israeli authorities had resorted to the most evil methods - arbitrary arrests, police violence, detention without trial, deportations, collective punishments and mass reprisals - in disregard of all accepted international standards, human dignity and civilized behaviour. The historical injustice perpetrated against the Palestinian people called for an urgent solution. The credibility of the world community depended on its ability to find a peaceful, just and durable settlement to that longstanding problem.

13. Bangladesh had strongly condemned the atrocities committed by the Israeli occupation forces, and had reiterated its unstinting support and its total commitment to the just cause of the Palestinians and to the realization of their inalienable and legitimate rights. Israel must withdraw from the occupied territories. Bangladesh fully supported the convening of an international conference on the Middle East under United Nations auspices and with the participation of all the parties directly concerned, including the PLO, on an equal footing.

14. Despite Israel's wilful and provocative disregard of Commission resolutions and its lack of co-operation, the Commission could not afford to despair. By continuing to keep the problem before it, by intensifying pressure on the occupying régime through mobilization of international public opinion and by devising further effective measures, it could genuinely help the oppressed people of the occupied Arab territories and bring an end to their immense sufferings. While the Commission's immediate concern was to induce the Israeli authorities to put an immediate end to the violation of human rights in its various manifestations in the occupied Arab territories, the ultimate objective of all its efforts must be to restore their fundamental, legitimate and inalienable rights to the Palestinian people.

15. Mr. Bernales Ballesteros (Peru) took the Chair.

16. Mr. DUNA (Observer for Turkey) said that the Arab-Israeli conflict remained a source of deep concern for his country, which, because of its geographical situation and its historical ties with the region, had a very strong interest in seeing an end to the conflict. It went without saying that the question of Palestine was the core of the conflict and that there could be no lasting peace in the region so long as that question remained unsolved.

The question was an extremely serious one, with repercussions on the world situation, and it could not be solved unless Israel withdrew from all the Arab territories it had occupied since 1967 and until it recognized the inalienable rights of the Palestinians, including the right to have their own State. A new and peaceful order could then be established in the region, in which the State of Palestine and the State of Israel would live within secure and internationally recognized boundaries.

17. Unfortunately, events during the past year had taken a turn in the opposite direction because of Israel's intransigence. The suspension of the dialogue between the United States and the PLO had been another adverse development. Israel's rejection of peace initiatives had been coupled with its policy of systematic repression of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. The Israeli authorities had continued to suppress the Palestinian uprising with increasingly harsh measures. In its report, the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices affecting the Human Rights of the Population of the Occupied Territories described the cruel methods employed against demonstrators and strikers. Deportation measures, increased restrictions on educational institutions and health and social welfare organizations, and constant harassment had produced intolerable conditions for the Palestinians.

18. Despite vigorous opposition by the international community and in contravention of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, Israel had continued to pursue its policy of establishing settlements in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. The indiscriminate use of violence to suppress the intifada at all costs had culminated in the tragic events that had occurred at the Al-Aqsa Mosque on 8 October 1990. Turkey strongly condemned the acts of violence committed by the Israeli security forces, which had led to the deaths of more than 20 Palestinians and the wounding of many others, and it called for an end to all the harsh practices directed against Palestinian civilians.

19. The level of tension and violence in the territories had demonstrated once again the need for urgent measures to be taken to protect the Palestinians. The reaction of the Security Council, which, in resolutions 672 (1990) and 673 (1990) had emphasized the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to all the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, was a first step in that direction.

20. The attempts to suppress the legitimate rebellion in the occupied Arab territories by force and violence were doomed to failure. Like all peoples, the Palestinians had a right to live in freedom in their own State. The Israeli Government must be persuaded to respect not only the Fourth Geneva Convention but also Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Turkey had consistently advocated a just settlement of the problem of Palestinian refugees, who had undergone untold sufferings for more than 40 years. In that connection, it emphasized the role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which needed more support in order to fulfil its increasingly difficult mission. Israel must co-operate with that humanitarian organization and allow it to perform its task effectively.

21. The solution to the humanitarian problem posed by the case of the Palestinians depended on a political settlement of the question of Palestine. A major obstacle to efforts to tackle the substance of the question had been the lack of a proper negotiation mechanism. While it was extremely disappointed at the current deadlock in the peace process, Turkey believed that a solution must be found by negotiation among all parties, including the PLO. It hoped that the efforts to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict would be resumed following a solution of the Gulf crisis. Israel must realize that, by further intransigence, it would only aggravate the situation, and Turkey urged it to reconsider its position and to seek reconciliation with the Palestinians.

22. Mr. WANG Xuexian, (China), said that although, in the view of some people, democracy and human rights had progressed in many countries since the Commission's previous session, they were still far from being realized by the Palestinians and other Arabs in the occupied territories, whose fundamental right to survival itself was seriously threatened. In disregard of international law and of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Israeli authorities were continuing to pursue their policy of systematic and flagrant violation of the rights of the Palestinian people - a policy that had been unanimously condemned by all justice-loving countries and peoples.

23. The realistic attitude adopted by the Palestine Liberation Organization, the initiatives it had taken and the efforts of the Arab countries and the international community as a whole to find a solution to the conflict had been met by Israel's stubborn refusal to withdraw from the Arab territories it had occupied since 1967, to recognize the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and even simply to enter into dialogue with the PLO. The Israeli authorities had, moreover, continued to establish Jewish colonies in the occupied territories and to apply increasingly harsh measures to suppress the uprising of the Palestinian people, thus halting the peace process that had been begun. The Palestinian question was the crux of all the problems of the Middle East, where there could be no enduring peace until the sufferings of the Palestinian people were brought to an end.

24. China had consistently considered that the key to the conflict lay in Israel's abandonment of its policy of expansion, its withdrawal from the territories it had occupied since 1967, recognition of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people and mutual recognition of Palestine by Israel and of Israel by Palestine, so that all countries in the Middle East, including Palestine and Israel, could at last live in peace. Those objectives could be achieved only by convening an international conference on the Middle East question under United Nations auspices and with the participation of the five permanent members of the Security Council and of the parties to the conflict. It was to be hoped that Israel would finally listen to the voice of justice and reason and withdraw from the occupied territories in order to facilitate the establishment of peace and stability in the Middle East, something that was also in the interest of the Israeli people.

25. The Chinese Government and people would continue to support the just struggle of the Palestinian people and the efforts of the PLO, the Arab countries, the United Nations and other parties to find a political solution to the Palestinian question, based on recognition by Israel of the right to self-determination and other human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Palestinian people.

26. His delegation hoped that the Commission would make an effective contribution to the efforts of other United Nations bodies and of the entire international community to ensure the earliest possible restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

27. Mr. MASRI (Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic) said that once again the Commission was called upon to examine the question of human rights violations in the Arab territories occupied by Israel and the barbarous acts perpetrated by that country against the Palestinian people, in contempt of international values and United Nations resolutions. The sufferings endured by the Arab people called for immediate adoption by the international community of measures to halt the destruction and occupation of those territories, which constituted a flagrant violation of international law. In its resolution 45/74, the General Assembly had again expressed its concern at the dangerous situation prevailing in Palestine and in the other occupied Arab territories, reaffirming that the occupation had led to flagrant violations of the human rights of the population, and condemning the policy and the repressive measures applied by the Israelis in those territories.

28. Since 1981 Israel had also imposed its laws, jurisdiction and administration in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan. That decision had been considered as an act of aggression according to the Definition of Aggression contained in Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX), and had been judged illegal and thus null and void by the Security Council in its resolution 497 (1981). The inhabitants of the Syrian Arab Golan had faced that new trial with courage. They had rejected Israeli identity and were still struggling against the policy of oppression and the violations of their civil, political and economic rights.

29. It was time for the international community to take action, so as to compel Israel finally to comply with the United Nations resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention and so as to ensure protection of the populations of the occupied Arab territories. The General Assembly, in its resolution 45/74 B of 11 December 1990, and the Security Council, in its resolution 681 (1990), had also requested all parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure that Israel complied with the Convention. However, the previous day's incursions by Israeli forces into southern Lebanon, which had produced many victims, were proof that Israel had no intention of giving up its policy of aggression in the region, its occupation of the Arab territories and the establishment of Jewish colonies in those territories, and it thus posed a serious and direct threat to international peace and security. Nevertheless, neither the Palestinian people nor the other Arabs in the occupied territories had abandoned their struggle against the occupation; the proof was that the intifada was now entering its fourth year. The whole world was again hoping that, at the present session, the Commission on Human Rights would be able successfully to accomplish the humanitarian mission with which it had been entrusted by the international community.

30. Mr. CALOVSKI (Yugoslavia) said that his delegation welcomed the election to the chairmanship of the Commission on Human Rights of a representative of Peru, a country with which Yugoslavia had always had excellent relations and bilateral and multilateral co-operation arrangements, and which, furthermore, had an active profile in the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

31. The numerous documents on the situation of the Arab territories occupied by Israel provided detailed information on the many violations of which the populations of those territories were the victims at the political, economic, social and cultural level, and indeed, in every other field of human activity. The fact that those violations were still taking place, with no end in sight, was clear proof that all the efforts by the international community over a number of years to put an end to them had failed. What, then, could the Commission do to bring an end once and for all to that unacceptable state of affairs? Clearly, it was necessary to eliminate the causes of the problem, namely, the occupation of the Arab territories by Israel and the failure to observe the principles of international law, inter alia, those of the Fourth Geneva Convention, by the Israeli occupying forces. The only way to attain that goal, having regard to the events in the Middle East and the current state of international relations, was to convene an international conference under United Nations auspices. In the view of his country, and of the other countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, such a conference was indispensable, was needed urgently, and should be accorded high priority by the United Nations. Any further postponements could only increase the threat to international peace and security and encourage further human rights violations in the occupied Arab territories.

32. The struggle for peace was now more necessary than ever before, and it would succeed only if the causes of wars, of underdevelopment, and of human rights violations and discrimination were eliminated. His delegation hoped that the work of the Commission at its forty-seventh session would contribute to the initiation of a process aimed at halting human rights violations in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories.

33. Mr. AL-JADIR (Arab Organization for Human Rights) said that his organization's annual report for 1990 set out in detail the countless violations perpetrated by the Israeli occupying forces in the occupied territories. The 1948 war had resulted, inter alia, in the largest wave of forcible emigration in the twentieth century. According to UNRWA statistics, more than 960,000 Palestinians had had to emigrate in June 1950, and a further 50,000 in the wake of the 1967 war. After 1967 those movements had continued in various forms, and the Government of Israel had also expelled many persons in order to cut down Palestinian resistance. In all, more than one and a half million Palestinians had had to leave their country since 1948. Furthermore, the conditions in the refugee camps were tragic.

34. Yet article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provided that "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country", and freedom of movement was an integral part of individual freedom and of the right to self-determination. A discriminatory policy was thus being applied to the Palestinian people, in flagrant disregard of the basic human rights instruments.

35. General Assembly resolution 194 (III) had provided "that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return ...". Since then, the General Assembly had consistently reaffirmed that right in many resolutions and had been obliged to note with regret, year after year, that the Palestinian refugees had still not been permitted to return to their country, nor had they received compensation. It must not be

forgotten that the admission of Israel as a Member of the United Nations in 1949 had been made conditional on that country declaring itself ready to apply the resolutions of the General Assembly, particularly those regarding the Palestinian refugees and Jerusalem.

36. In its resolution 237 (1967), adopted after the 1967 war, the Security Council had called upon the Government of Israel to ensure the safety, welfare and security of the inhabitants of the areas where military operations had taken place and to facilitate the return of those inhabitants who had fled the areas since the outbreak of hostilities. Again, in December 1969 the General Assembly had reaffirmed that the Palestinians were being deprived of their elementary rights, and had drawn the international community's attention to the refusal of the Israeli Government to authorize the return of the exiles to their country. General Assembly resolution 3236 (XXIX), adopted in 1974, had gone a stage further by reaffirming the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including "the right to self-determination without external interference", "the right to national independence and sovereignty", and "the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property ...". Yet, once again, Israel had turned a deaf ear to those calls.

37. Lastly, it was his hope that the Security Council and the General Assembly, which would perhaps soon be called upon to play a positive role in the settlement of the conflicts in the Middle East, would finally bring about a satisfactory solution to the Palestinian problem.

38. Mr. RETUREAU (World Federation of Trade Unions) deplored the fact that the human rights situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Palestinian territories occupied by Israel in June 1967, had continued to deteriorate since the Commission's previous session. The treatment of the Palestinian population by the Israeli occupying forces was a denial of the most elementary of human rights: the right to life, the right to live in one's own home in one's own country, the right to education, and the right to humane treatment. The occupying authorities were giving free rein to their programme of systematic violations of human rights and international law, especially the conventions applicable to the situation of the civilian population of the occupied Palestinian territories, and were displaying utter contempt for the resolutions of international bodies. The situation was viewed with the greatest concern by the World Federation of Trade Unions and its member organizations. Not a week passed without Palestinians in the occupied territories being killed or wounded: 1,012 Palestinians had been killed between 8 December 1987 and 8 January 1991. Sometimes those attacks took on the proportion of veritable massacres, as in the case of the incident on 8 October 1990 on the esplanade in front of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The Jewish settlers and Israeli extremists did not hesitate to shed Palestinian blood, since they could be sure of going unpunished, or of incurring only the most lenient sentences. He cited specific examples in that regard.

39. Although article 49 of the 1949 Geneva Convention expressly prohibited "individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, ... regardless of their motive.", and in spite of resolution 607 adopted by the Security Council on 5 January 1988, which called upon Israel to "refrain from deporting any

Palestinian civilians from the occupied territories", the Israeli occupying authorities continued to show total scorn for international law and the United Nations resolutions. For example, once again, four Palestinians from the Gaza Strip had been expelled to southern Lebanon - a zone occupied by Israel - on 8 January 1991, bringing the number of Palestinians deported since the start of the intifada on 8 December 1987 up to 65. Since 8 December 1987, tens of thousands of Palestinians had been arrested and detained in internment centres situated, contrary to the provisions of the Geneva Conventions, in Israeli territory. Needless to say, the conditions of detention were atrocious, and the treatment of the detainees was inhuman. In addition, since 23 September 1990, 14 Palestinian trade unionists had been held under administrative arrest for renewable periods of three to six months. Trade union rights, in particular the right to organize and the right to strike, were not respected, and the activities of the trade unions and their leaders were systematically hampered, in violation of ILO Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 and of the resolution on trade union rights adopted by the Commission at its forty-sixth session.

40. It had become a daily occurrence in the occupied territories for houses inhabited by persons accused of "activities contrary to the security of Israel" to be demolished or walled up.

41. His organization also wished to raise the question of immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel, and to highlight the threat that the influx of immigrants constituted to the fate of the Palestinians, particularly in the light of a declaration by the Israeli Prime Minister that it was necessary to "retain a Greater Israel for the great immigration". According to information received by WFTU, hundreds of recent Jewish immigrants were being settled in the occupied territories in violation of the Geneva Conventions and in total disregard of resolutions of the United Nations Security Council.

42. The Gulf conflict had served as a pretext for a worsening of the living conditions of the populations of the territories. A virtually permanent curfew had been declared and no provision existed for protection of the Arab population. Only 20,000 or so gas masks and garments providing protection against chemical substances had been distributed, for a population of 1.7 million. The settlers were well equipped, and the policy was thus one of true racial discrimination.

43. The intifada was a political struggle for liberation, with no weapons other than courage and stones. Yet the reaction by the occupying force was out of all proportion and made the movement even more radical by attempting to drive the Palestinians to desperate measures. It was all compounded by hatred and racism, which militated against a peace that respected justice and the right of both peoples to self-determination and to their own homeland.

44. The World Federation of Trade Unions called upon the Commission and all Member States of the United Nations to take immediate and effective measures to compel the Israeli Government to halt its violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people and to respect their inalienable and universally recognized national rights.

45. It was more than ever essential that an international conference, convened under United Nations auspices with the participation of the permanent members of the Security Council and all the parties concerned, including the

Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole authentic representative of the Palestinians, should be held at the earliest possible opportunity in order to settle the region's problems. The absence of a negotiated settlement was, as could be seen, a destabilizing factor throughout the Near and Middle East. Lastly, he would stress that international law must be universal, and not variable in its application.

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF COLOMBIA

46. Mr. JARAMILLO (Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia) said that his country was faithful to the Latin American tradition of respect for the self-determination of peoples, and for the freedom of each community to choose the model of social, economic and political organization best suited to its particular circumstances. The Commission's previous session had taken place in a climate of optimism and confidence, owing to the fact that the close of the 1980s had seen the end of the cold war, and that the world seemed to be moving closer to a new international balance based on freedom and co-operation between the various forces that had previously divided it. But yesterday's optimism had given place to concern at the conflict that was shaking the international community and making it impossible to see beyond the Commission's current session.

47. The war had masked the other international problems and had revealed yet more clearly the gap between the industrialized countries and the developing countries, together with the serious risk that the conflict might lead to a further widening of those differences. During its term as a member of the Security Council, Colombia had spared no effort to seek a peaceful diplomatic solution to the Gulf crisis and to all the conflicts with which the Council had had to deal. The failure of the discussions with a view to arriving at a negotiated solution had shown that violence was a scourge difficult to eradicate, and also that the international community was not yet capable of replacing war by peace and confrontation by dialogue. It had also shown that the universal system of the United Nations, set up to secure peaceful settlement of disputes between States, had not yet reached the highest level of organization, and that it had still needed machinery enabling it effectively to accomplish its task of mediator.

48. The two-bloc confrontation resulting from the Second World War had dominated the international scene for the past 45 years and, since enormous sums had been devoted to weaponry, the effect had been to postpone the analysis and solution of a number of problems in the developing world. Nevertheless, it had also created a system of rules that had governed the world so far. The end of that state of affairs and the changes that had taken place compelled the international community to lose no time in preparing and adopting norms to govern the newly established order.

49. The problem of development definitely lay at the core of the problem of the instability of the world situation, and the major cause to be espoused was elimination of the poverty afflicting billions of human beings. Until such time as the problems of poverty and development, which affected the majority of the world's population, were solved, the threats to the environment, the dangers of illicit trafficking in and consumption of drugs, the prospect of mass migrations, oppression, housing shortages, the tragedy of the refugees, the situation of all the underprivileged sectors who were deprived of a minimum income and basic care, to the extent of being unable to preserve their dignity, would remain a reality or a threat for mankind.

50. It was impossible to come seriously to grips with such an undertaking without recognizing that a solution to the problem of poverty involved a net transfer of resources and technology transfers from the industrialized to the developing countries, in contrast to the present situation. It was estimated that $40 billion would be transferred from the South to the North in 1991. Prices of commodities from the countries of the South were at their lowest level since the Depression of the 1930s, because of the generalized subsidies and the restrictive trade practices in the industrialized countries. That was what the crisis and the despair of the peoples of the third world boiled down to. Needless to say, not only economic development but also social and political development were involved. In that regard, however, it must again be stressed that it was futile and undesirable to superimpose systems and institutions specific to certain countries upon others without taking account of differing traditions and cultures.

51. The Government of Colombia had embarked upon a campaign to foster a human rights culture and it intended to honour the commitments entered into under the conventions and covenants to which Colombia was a party. Despite difficulties that were well known, Colombia had set itself the task of strengthening its democratic system and of providing it with a sound economic structure and with institutions based on social justice, with a view to broadening the area in which economic, social and cultural rights could be enjoyed, and to making possible the full exercise of civil and political rights.

52. Measures had been taken to combat abuses of power by agents of the State, and a restructuring of justice was under way, intended to ensure that offences could not go unpunished. The current revision of the Constitution was intended, inter alia, to make strict respect for the new fundamental rights of the citizen a constitutional norm. But action would concentrate above all on the development of democratic institutions and on education in human rights. It was important to foster certain types of conduct and to initiate civilian society and civil servants into pluralism and harmonious coexistence between individuals and groups. Colombia wished to put an end to dogmatism at every level of society, and the Colombian people were already learning to accept pluralism in convictions, opinions and ethnic groups.

53. The complexity of the situation in Colombia called for a total commitment to human rights on the part of the Government. The Government had scrutinized the shortcomings of Colombian democracy, and was endeavouring to rectify them. It was a task for the long term, but the great sacrifices that Colombian society had had to make would be offset by a burgeoning culture of human rights, for the greater good of future generations.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.